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ABSTRACT

This is a report on how Parkland College's (Illinois) core values are communicated to students and the community. Four focus groups--one with 11 faculty members, one with 10 students, 1 with 6 professional staff, and 1 with 7 administrators--were asked to discuss 6 core values: (1) honesty and integrity; (2) fairness and just treatment; (3) responsibility; (4) multiculturalism; (5) education; and (6) public trust. The student group had difficulty defining some of the core values, but they did express that the college did seem to be concerned about students and multiculturalism. This group also stated that faculty and staff were generally very helpful and supportive. The faculty, administrator, and staff groups stated that the core values were measures of college effectiveness as well as desired goals and aspirations for the college. All groups felt that the college was fair, just, and responsible. No group felt that there was preferential treatment provided to any group. The diversity of student, faculty, staff, courses and programs at the college were viewed as campus strengths. Furthermore, faculty, staff, and administrators expressed that the college worked hard to meet the needs of the community as well as the demands of business and industry. The focus group interview questions and the college core values statement are appended. (MKF)

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Study of Parkland College Core Values

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this project was to perform a qualitative study to identify how Parkland College communicates its core values and to explore perceptions regarding how the College practices these values.

The study involved two approaches. **Four focus group discussions** with separate groups for faculty (full and part-time), students (all but one employed by the College), professional support staff, and administrators were moderated by the consultant on July 19-20, 2000. A total of 34 individuals took part. A **summary content analysis of key college literature** was performed by the consultant to identify where and how Parkland College core values are communicated in the College's literature.

Several major themes threaded through the focus group discussions. Participants spoke very positively about Parkland's emphasis on and concern for students, multiculturalism as a special strength, Parkland being a good place to work, and their pride in the institution. Students spent a good deal of time giving positive observations about faculty and staff. They believe faculty want them to succeed and perceive that most faculty will go out of their way to work with students.

Faculty, administrators and staff offered a variety of explanations and definitions for what "core values" meant to them either personally or with reference to Parkland College. Faculty noted there can be different interpretations of core values: are they aspirations for the organization, prescriptions for desired behavior, or measures against which to check actions and decisions? Students were less able to express ideas defining core values and remained mostly silent on this topic.

Most participants believe people at Parkland are not familiar with the core values as they are written in the College's Statement of Core Values, but they perceive the values are consistent with what employees and students would say Parkland stands for. They saw no priorities among the values.

Main observations shared for each value were:

- **Honesty and Integrity** - Participants expressed support for this core value and some indicated the current administration has "gone a long way" in communicating honestly and with integrity compared to the past administration. At the same time, however, a number of employees suggested the College can improve the extent to which timely, open communications takes place with respect to job changes and reorganizations. Another topic discussed in relation to this core value was academic dishonesty. Faculty, students and administrators agreed that academic dishonesty is a concern at the College (staff did not address this aspect of honesty and integrity).

- **Fairness and Just Treatment** - Participants in all groups expressed the opinion that students at Parkland are nearly always treated fairly and with justice, although students identified a couple of examples where they believed the College had not acted with fairness and just treatment. There were a few comments regarding whether Parkland lives out this value in dealing with employees. Several participants in the employee groups noted that staff and part-time faculty are not accorded the same degree of respect or compensation as full-time faculty.

- **Responsibility** - There was general consensus that students today, especially younger ones, are perceived to be less responsible than students in the past. Discussions revealed some interesting conundrums. Several participants, including some students, said the College's many support services may actually be impeding students' learning responsibility because help is so readily available to them. They suggested Parkland's actions to increase enrollment may have resulted in recruiting students less committed to or prepared for their educations and, by implication, less responsible in their academic behavior. Some thought that as Parkland tries to be more responsible to students through policies such as assessment and course placement, the College's stand could be perceived as putting impediments in students' way. Several participants said that while most faculty are very responsible, some simply come, teach their classes, and do not contribute to the life of the institution. Student participants thought the descriptive paragraph about the core value of responsibility was too wordy and the first sentence alone would be sufficient.

- **Multiculturalism** - Participants perceived that multiculturalism is a very important core value at Parkland and a real strength of the institution. They noted that multiculturalism has many meanings, including not just racial, ethnic, or cultural diversity, but also sexual preference and urban-rural diversity. Living out the value of multiculturalism takes many forms at Parkland: curriculum expansion, visible leadership by the president, diversity workshops, the diversity of Parkland's student body, and programs to recruit minority faculty. Participants, especially administrators, suggested that multiculturalism is the core value that most lends itself to multiple interpretations, concerns about favoring a particular group, and even contentiousness. They also said there is probably more misinformation about this core value than any of the others, though didn't give examples or details to elaborate.

- **Education** - Participants expressed pride in Parkland's diverse curriculum and, for the most part, its academic standards of quality. In the opinion of focus group participants Parkland most definitely provides lifelong learning for students of all ages, and they pointed to Parkland's programs for business and industry as yet another indicator of the range of academic programs. The wide range of student support services was seen as contributing to the quality of Parkland's education programs. There is broad agreement that Parkland supports innovation and delivers instruction through a range of modalities.

  Though the following observations are not related exclusively to the core value of education because they apply to all program and service areas, they were made during the discussion of the core value of education.

Employees said that Parkland "doesn't let you rest," and they worried there might be exhaustion setting in from there being so many initiatives. People can be overwhelmed by just trying to keep up. They implied the College needs to seek a balance so as not to burn out committed, energetic employees. Several participants commented that Parkland is less territorial than other institutions where they had worked.

- **Public Trust** - Students were not sure where Parkland "was going" with this core value and were least able to discuss it. Other participants were virtually unanimous in asserting that Parkland does have the public's trust. They noted examples such as the Futures Conferences, the president's personal initiatives to meet with educators and other community leaders in rural areas, and Parkland's many partnerships. Some faculty said that many colleagues feel threatened by an outcomes-based environment; they also reflected on the potential conflict that can arise between responding to immediate business/industry needs and providing a broader education infused with liberal arts and critical thinking.

Participants offered a number of concrete ideas about what Parkland might do to strengthen the core values even more.

The consultant was asked to broach the topic of student drinking with focus groups to glean their perceptions, though this subject is not directly connected with the core values study. A number of participants acknowledged that some Parkland students, especially younger ones, seem to drink excessively or at least to talk about the amount of drinking they do. The groups did not become highly engaged in the discussion of drinking or pursue any discussions of substance abuse beyond alcohol.

The written materials reviewed were of high quality. The most overriding observation is that publications lack consistency in presenting Parkland's six core values and that some documents contain statements dealing implicitly with values that are not repeated elsewhere; e.g, section about Parkland's personality and character in Policy 1.02, quality statement in Parkland's Strategic Plan and the nine points in the president's vision statement on the Webpage. This may be due to the fact that some literature was probably prepared before the values were adopted or because the values were not thought to be germane to that particular brochure or publication. Parkland may wish to create a template or checklist to assist those writing and designing publications to systematically evaluate their drafts and make explicit decisions about whether and what to include about the core values.

Based on this study it appears Parkland College's core values are generally if not specifically understood and are consistent with the ways in which students and employees experience and describe the institution.

Study of Parkland College Core Values
Conducted by Trudy Bers
August, 2000

Purpose

To perform a qualitative study to identify how Parkland College communicates its core values and to explore perceptions regarding how the College practices these values (see Appendix A for a copy of the core values). An important objective of the study was to provide Parkland College with information permitting the institution to better align its systems so that core values may be communicated and practiced consistently and with integrity.

Methodology

The study involved two approaches.

- The primary approach for examining how Parkland College core values are perceived was through **four focus group discussions**. Separate groups were convened for faculty (full and part-time), students (all but one employed by the College), professional support staff, and administrators. The focus group methodology is described more fully in Part I of the Results section of this report.

- In addition, a **summary content analysis of key college literature** was performed to identify where and how Parkland College core values are communicated in the College's literature. The content analysis methodology is described more fully in Part II of the Results section of this report.

Results

I. Focus Groups

Organization and logistics

Separate focus groups for faculty (full and part-time), students (all but one employed by the College), professional support staff, and administrators were convened on July 19-20, 2000. Parkland's Director of Director of Development, Research and Planning recruited participants. Discussions were held on the College campus; each lasted approximately 90 minutes. A total of 34 individuals participated. Each group comprised the following

number of participants: faculty, 11; students, 10; professional support staff, 6; and administrators, 7. Using an institutionally approved discussion guide (see Appendix B) the project consultant moderated each group. Specific follow-up questions and prompts were adapted to the conversations as they unfolded. The consultant took notes on the discussions; no observers were present nor were groups audio or videotaped.

Focus group results are presented in broad themes reflecting conversations and comments of participants. Consistent with best practices for reporting focus group results, no attempt is made to give absolute numbers or percentages of respondents expressing a perception or viewpoint. Instead, broader terms such as "a few," "most," or "nearly all" are used. Individuals are not identified and care has been taken to eliminate information that might reveal who made a comment or observation.

To organize the report, the broad question or statement eliciting conversation on a particular subject related to Parkland's core values is presented. Perceptions of participants in the groups are then summarized. When members of a particular group had unique perspectives or were especially silent about a topic, this is noted as well.

Focus Group Results

Themes running through focus group discussions

Several themes emerged from the focus group discussions. They were mentioned in conjunction with several different core values and/or when the conversation shifted to a more general plane. These themes present some powerful indications of how focus group participants perceive Parkland College and its core values.

- Emphasis on students

  Throughout the conversations participants talked about Parkland's emphasis on and concern for students. They cited such college attributes as numerous and varied student support services, one-on-one assistance for students and small class sizes to enhance students' experiences, willingness of faculty and staff members to work with students, a welcoming supportive environment for students, and varied programs and services to serve students with different educational needs and objectives.

- Student appreciation for faculty

  In their discussion students turned almost immediately to perceptions of faculty when they began to talk about Parkland. Their observations were very positive. Clearly these students have high regard for the faculty and express the opinion that faculty care greatly about them. The students believe faculty want them to succeed and perceive that most faculty will go out of their way to work with students.

- Multiculturalism a special strength

  Participants expressed the opinion that multiculturalism is a special strength at Parkland. They noted that Parkland has done a great deal in this area; e.g., offering diversity and multiculturalism workshops and programs, creating a welcoming environment for people from varied ethnic and racial groups, expanding the concept of multiculturalism to include urban-rural diversity and diversity in sexual preference, and creating unique hiring programs to expand faculty diversity. They noted, in particular, the strong and visible leadership role of the president in championing multiculturalism.

- Good place to work

  Participants believe Parkland is a good place to work. A number commented on the longevity of Parkland employees. Some who had worked elsewhere compared Parkland very favorably with their prior institutions. They said attributes such as trust, flexibility, concern, and innovation where far more prevalent at Parkland than elsewhere. A few employees expressed concerns about limited communications with individuals whose jobs were being changed or area being reorganized. However, even those who expressed reservations about Parkland's complete honesty with employees about these matters (this phrase was used by those making the observation) were enthusiastic about the college overall.

- Pride in the institution

  Focus group participants are very proud of Parkland. In each group at least one person commented on the excellent reputation Parkland enjoys in the community and in the nation, the award winning programs at Parkland, and the excellence of its academic programs and services.

These broad themes establish a framework within which to present and examine more detailed discussions that took place during the focus groups. Together, the themes convey a strong message that participants hold Parkland in very high regard and are proud and enthusiastic about their association with the college.

The remainder of this section provides more detail about topics discussed in the focus groups. Each topic is introduced with questions or statements dealing with that topic, followed by a summary of the discussion relevant to the topic.

Are Parkland students, faculty, administrators and staff familiar with the general concept or term "core values?" What does the term mean to them? How do focus group participants describe Parkland's core values? [Note: this discussion occurred before Parkland's core values statement was distributed.]

Faculty, administrators and staff offered a variety of explanations and definitions for what "core values" meant to them either personally or with reference to Parkland College. Students were less able to express ideas defining core values and remained mostly silent on this topic.

Participants expressed a variety of definitions for "core values." For example they said core values were like a code of ethics, a touchstone for self-analysis and by which to know where to take an organization, moral underpinnings, the "essence" of an organization, strengths through and around which the college can do anything, ideals to which Parkland should aspire, what [you] live by, how one treats others and what is expected in return, what drives other decisions on campus, guidelines to live by, those things held important by the institution, morals and ethics, a way of projecting sincerity for the well-being of students and employees, something easy to embrace and live by, and reflecting high standards.

A small number of participants expressed some concern that core values could be used as measuring sticks against which to assess actions and even to require corrective actions. They did not want Parkland's core values to be used this way.

More than the other groups, the faculty group engaged in philosophical discussions about the meaning of core values and how they might be realized in an organization. For example, faculty spent some time talking about tensions around the concept of core values. They mused about whether core values are aspirations for the organization, prescriptions for desired behavior, or measures against which to check actions and decisions. Faculty also noted there are different ways to achieve an ideal and there may be conflicting definitions of the same value.

A few employees suggested the appropriate use of the core values was not as a list to be memorized. Rather, the values should be part of the fabric of the institution, implicit guides to attitude and behaviors. The values could also serve as vehicles for teaching across the institution; for example, when students are asked to provide information about themselves on various College forms staff could explain why the information was being sought and the importance of giving honest, accurate information.

One participant wondered if the core values statement was intended more for external than for internal consumption, but then acknowledged that publishing the core values now reaffirms to external and internal constituencies that these are held important by the institution.

When asked what Parkland College stands for, students were initially silent. Some then offered suggestions such as "associate degrees and technical education," a "stepping stone to a four-year school or into the workplace," "high standards for students," and "challenge students as a university would."

To elicit more ideas from students several additional prompts were used. Students were asked to think about the term "ethics" and whether anything about that word and Parkland College came to mind. They were quiet. They were then asked what they would say if given 30-45 seconds to tell someone about Parkland. This prompt generated many responses, nearly all of which centered on faculty and the support they feel at the College from faculty and staff. Participants said they feel welcomed and wanted, there is lots of help, Parkland is very teacher-student oriented, and faculty are available to help and work with students. They noted small class sizes and the fact that students could talk with instructors they had in prior semesters as well as current instructors. They mentioned links with other colleges as well, especially the University of Illinois and Eastern Illinois University. In their view Parkland has an excellent reputation.

When asked to describe Parkland's core values other groups were also mindful of the centrality of students. Some staff participants, for example, noted that in their view Parkland was all about "serving students," making "students feel welcome," and making the student experience both inside and outside the classroom valuable for teaching students how to live. Employees felt there were no surprises in Parkland's core values; they are generalizable and universal. Though voiced by only person, a concern was expressed that the term "core values" may be perceived as another buzzword.

Are people at Parkland familiar with *Parkland's* core values? [Note: Parkland's statement of core values was distributed prior to this part of each focus group discussion; see Appendix A.]

Most participants believe people at Parkland are not familiar with the core values as they are written in the College' Statement of Core Values. They perceive the values are consistent with what employees and students would say Parkland stands for, however. One long-time employee suggested that, except for the multiculturalism value, the other values have been part of the institution since it was founded.

Participants in most groups, the student group excepted, remembered there having been discussions about core values some time ago. They recalled e-mails and forums seeking input and acknowledged faculty and staff had an opportunity to learn about the core values. Most indicated there had been little discussion of the core values in the last months—perhaps year—since they were adopted.

Only one student—who had been involved in student government—was clearly aware of the core values and the process for developing them. Some students recalled seeing the core values (they mentioned the student handbook), but they did not think most students would be very interested in knowing the specific core values.

One participant suggested Parkland educators were trying to use common language to reinforce the core values statement. For example, in the past the term "plagiarism" was used, but now the term "academic honesty' is used more widely, and this usage can reinforce the core value "honesty and integrity."

Are some values more important or visible than others?

Most participants saw no priorities among the values. Those involved in developing them could not remember a rationale for ordering the values and all perceived them to be of equal importance at the College. Some did suggest that multiculturalism seems not to be receiving as much explicit emphasis as had been the case a year or more ago. There was no consensus about whether this value should receive greater attention now, though some employees noted it was important to continue to offer diversity workshops and other professional development activities related to multiculturalism.

Some faculty also suggested that Parkland's core values have different degrees of saliency as related to classes; for example, the values education and multiculturalism and very important in some courses because they pertain directly to the subject matter.

Do people at Parkland act in ways that are consistent with each of the core values? What are examples of ways in which people act consistently or inconsistently with each value?

To organize this section, observations are grouped under the core value most germane to the comments and perceptions. However, it should be noted that as the conversations actually unfolded there were many statements related to more than one core value. Thus this section should be read in its entirety and without the assumption that every viewpoint related to a specific core value is presented under that value.

- Honesty and Integrity

  Participants expressed support for this core value and some indicated the current administration has "gone a long way" in communicating honestly and with integrity compared to the past administration. At the same time, however, a number of employees suggested the College can improve the extent to which honest communication takes place. Some said that reorganizations and job changes were sometimes made without communicating ahead of time with those affected or seeking their assistance to ensure necessary tasks continued to be assigned and carried out. A few noted issues related to part-time faculty compensation as an area where open communications were sometimes lacking, though they also acknowledged there may be legitimate disagreement among Parkland employees about this issue. A few participants said they were aware that some of their colleagues would not feel

comfortable expressing honest opinions, particularly to top-level administrators, although there was general agreement that among peers, honest communications were the norm. Several people commented explicitly that they found more freedom of expression at Parkland than at other institutions where they had worked.

The discussion about honesty and integrity dealt also with the issue of student academic honesty, cheating and plagiarism. Faculty, students and administrators agreed that academic dishonesty is a concern at the College (staff did not address this aspect of honesty and integrity). They said it was important to tell students what an instructor is looking for and what is expected in the course. Some said students don't always know what constitutes academic dishonesty. Faculty members expressed conflicting opinions about whether the College has a clear, implemented policy for dealing with cases of student academic dishonesty. Some perceive the institution should clarify and communicate specific steps. All agreed that students can appeal decisions. It was unclear whether they perceive the appeal to a single individual is appropriate or whether there is or should be an appeal to a committee. Students readily acknowledged that academic dishonesty exists at Parkland. In their view there is more plagiarism on papers and assignments than cheating on exams because faculty, they believe, carefully monitor the latter.

- Fairness and Just Treatment

Participants expressed the opinion that students at Parkland are nearly always treated fairly and with justice. They noted the College strives to use the same criteria in evaluating cases that come before the Academic Standards Committee and devotes great efforts to helping students succeed. One participant suggested that being at Parkland was a good experience for people who have never thought through issues of equity and fairness, and that the administration and faculty deserve credit for "pushing fairness and equity to new levels." These comments seem to have been agreed with by others in that group.

Students identified a couple of examples where they believed the College had not acted with fairness and just treatment. One was a case where a nursing student was terminated from the program without being told why or even that she had been terminated (until she went to register for classes). Another had to do with a desire to give an honorary degree to Michael Hicks and the Board of Trustee's resistance to doing so. It should be noted that during the focus groups there was no opportunity to seek additional information on these incidents. Only the perceptions of students speaking out during the focus group are reported here.

There were a few comments regarding whether Parkland lives out this value in dealing with all employees. Several participants in the groups noted that staff and part-time faculty are not accorded the same degree of respect or compensation as full-time faculty. Some said there is a perception that it's easier to replace staff than faculty. Because many staff members aren't visible or their jobs aren't known, it is easy for people to forget about support staff, even to take them for granted. Some

said the College should communicate more clearly about benefits available to staff, especially for professional development and tuition reimbursement, and to do more to enable staff to take advantage of these opportunities, for example, by providing office coverage.

- Responsibility

There was general consensus that students today, especially younger ones, seem to be less responsible than students in the past. There were differing views about the extent to which Parkland teaches responsibility to students. For example, one participant said it was students' responsibility to know the policies and procedures governing them. Others noted that "responsibility" is defined differently by different individuals, and that some students display a sense of consumerism and entitlement through which they do not believe attending class or coming on time should be expected.

Discussions about responsibility revealed some interesting conundrums. For example, several participants, including some students, said the College's many support services may actually be impeding students' learning responsibility because help is so readily available to them. Others suggested the College's actions to increase enrollment may have resulted in recruiting students less committed to or prepared for their educations and, by implication, less responsible in their academic behavior. Another participant said that as Parkland tries to be more responsible to students through policies such as assessment and course placement, the College's stand could be perceived as putting impediments in students' way. The faculty group noted that the value of academic freedom sometimes conflicts with academic responsibility. They went on to note that Parkland "can't make anything mandatory for faculty." According to faculty participants, faculty adherence to Parkland's course outlines varies across departments. Other participants said that "any time any where any place" delivery of education may be sending a message that students don't have to do certain things and the College is not taking the time to teach reflection, contemplation, and the value of waiting for certain things.

Discussions about responsibility turned also to the question of employee responsibility. Several participants said that while most faculty are very responsible, some simply come, teach their classes, and do not contribute to the life of the institution. One person said this is a "well documented" perception.

Student participants thought the descriptive paragraph about the core value of responsibility was too wordy. They said the first sentence alone would be sufficient. This was the only description of a core value that elicited comments in any of the groups.

- Multiculturalism

Participants perceived that multiculturalism is a very important core value at Parkland and a real strength of the institution. Several suggested the College is probably well

ahead of certain elements in the community with regard to embracing multiculturalism, making people of all ethnic and racial backgrounds comfortable, and recognizing the importance of multiculturalism. In several discussions participants noted that multiculturalism has many meanings, including not just racial, ethnic, or cultural diversity. It also relates to sexual preference and urban-rural diversity, for example. One person said that a few voices alleging Parkland hasn't done enough in this area have "surplus visibility" and shouldn't be seen as speaking for the College.

Living out the value of multiculturalism takes many forms at Parkland. Faculty noted the curriculum has expanded to include multicultural issues and content in many courses and disciplines. Other participants commented on the president's leadership. A number of participants talked about the variety of students at Parkland, including international students, and noted this is a good check for the "real world." They commented that the diversity of Parkland's students was particularly important for students coming from small homogeneous communities, where they had no opportunity to interact with peers from different ethnic, racial and cultural background. Several students suggested that while students from different racial/ethnic groups didn't mix "as well as they should" at Parkland, there were many fewer conflicts and less racism than at the University of Illinois. Other participants noted the range of multicultural workshops offered at the College, and suggested diversity training should continue. They noted Parkland's award-winning multicultural programs, the PROF program to home grow faculty, and a project to hire non-tenured minority faculty for 1-2 year appointments to give both faculty and the College the chance to know one another.

Participants, especially administrators, suggested that multiculturalism is the core value that most lends itself to multiple interpretations, concerns about favoring a particular group, and even contentiousness. They were quick to say, however, that this value is not really contentious, but that the other five values are so uncontroversial that this one stands out simply by comparison. They also said there is probably more misinformation about this core value than any of the other values, though didn't give examples or details to elaborate.

- Education

Participants appear to take pride in Parkland's diverse curriculum and, for the most part, its academic standards of quality. In the opinion of focus group participants Parkland most definitely provides lifelong learning for students of all ages. Some participants noted Parkland's programs for business and industry as yet another indicator of the range of academic programs. The wide range of student support services was seen as contributing to the quality of Parkland's education programs, although a few faculty wondered whether the College's attempts to accommodate less prepared students has inadvertently resulted in a weakening of academic standards.

There is broad agreement that Parkland supports innovation and delivers instruction through a range of modalities. Several participants suggested that newly hired employees are expected to be innovative, though the College does not impose this expectation on long-time employees approaching retirement. Employees said that Parkland "doesn't let you rest," and they worried that there might be exhaustion setting in from there being so many initiatives. People can be overwhelmed by just trying to keep up. They implied the College needs to seek a balance so as not to burn out committed, energetic employees.

In discussing the core value of education, several participants commented that Parkland is less territorial than other institutions where they had worked. They cited examples of reconfiguring computer-related courses into a new department and the interest of department chairs in considering the staffing needs of non-instructional offices when future staffing plans were being developed.

- Public Trust

Students were not sure where Parkland "was going" with this core value and were least able to discuss it. They don't think people in the community know about Parkland.

Other participants were virtually unanimous in asserting that Parkland does have the public's trust. They noted Futures Conferences as an example of the College's reaching out to the community, although a couple of participants suggested information coming from the Conferences is not as well used as it should be in developing strategic plans for programs. A number of participants mentioned the College's reaching out to rural communities in the district and cited specifically the president's personal initiatives to meet with educators and other community leaders in the rural areas. Some noted her ability to work effectively with the Board of Trustees and the strong public support Board members display for the College. Parkland's many partnerships throughout the community were noted as another indicator of public trust.

Some faculty participants said that many colleagues feel threatened by an outcomes-based environment they apparently perceive to be growing at Parkland. They also reflected on the potential conflict that can arise between responding to immediate business/industry needs and providing a broader education infused with liberal arts and critical thinking. Several faculty said Parkland's strategic plan does not adequately reflect general education. Some said Parkland doesn't sufficiently reinforce the critical spirit of disciplines such as critical thinking within a discipline.

What would be some ways Parkland could encourage and support people to live out the core values?

Recall that the overwhelming sense of focus groups participants was that Parkland, for the most part, subscribes to and acts out its six core values. Participants were aware there are some inherent tensions and contradictions among and within the core values and multiple interpretations of the same value can lead to different opinions about the extent to which the value is actually realized at the College. While their overall opinions were very positive, participants did offer some concrete ideas about what Parkland might do to strengthen the core values even more.

Suggestions are presented in no specific order.

- Rethink and rebalance responsiveness to business/industry, on the one hand, and incorporating aspects of the liberal arts, general education and critical thinking in the College's programs, on the other hand.

- Include information about classroom management on course syllabi; e.g., instructor expectations about class attendance, tardiness, etc., and consequences for grades.

- Revisit financial aid policies and provision of scholarships for international (F-1) students, especially children of permanent residents.

- Permit international (F-1) students to work more than 20 hours per week, especially in the summer.

- Revisit incentives to encourage staff to take more courses and participate in professional development opportunities. Also encourage supervisors to find ways to provide office coverage so staff can take courses, workshops, etc.

- Inform staff about professional development benefits and opportunities available to them; e.g., tuition reimbursement.

- Change policy requiring staff to wait until classes begin to register for Parkland courses.

- Make every effort to communicate with individuals whose jobs are being changed and/or area being reorganized.

- Continue to offer multicultural and diversity workshops and training, emphasizing practical topics.

- Make Mass Transit District (MTD) bus passes available to Parkland students.

- Evaluate part-time faculty in all departments; do not retain faculty whose evaluations are low.

- Address student fears that their evaluations of faculty will not be anonymous and might affect their grades in future classes with the same instructor.
- Consider a mentoring program for part-time faculty.
- Reinstitute president's informal meetings with staff groups.
- Hold follow-up workshops and sessions for Parkland employees who have participated in the annual Leadership Conference.
- Hold a summer event for all employees.
- Have a two-part new employee orientation, one part to be held when a person first joins the College and the second part to be held some 6 months later, when individuals will have more experience and knowledge on which to base questions and understand information.
- Have an employee of the semester recognition program.
- Try to find balance between continual innovation and pressure to "keep up," on the one hand, and implementing programs/services and attending to personal lives, on the other hand.

Student drinking is receiving a great deal of national attention now. Is this a concern at Parkland?

This topic is not directly related to Parkland's statement of core values, but it does speak to issues of student life and the environment at Parkland. The consultant was asked to broach this topic with focus groups to glean their perceptions about the topic.

A number of participants acknowledged that come Parkland students seem to drink excessively, or at least to talk about the amount of drinking they do. This behavior occurs primarily among younger students, in their view. There was agreement among those who talked about student drinking that this is not as great a concern at commuter institutions than at residential colleges and universities. They suggested that because Parkland students live in the community and not in dormitories, fraternities and sororities, or other university-sanctioned housing, Parkland does have to be as involved in monitoring or guiding students' behavior. One student suggested that what seems to be excessive drinking is part of growing up in this country; she went on to note that in her native country, where the drinking age is 18, students grow up with moderate, legal drinking. The groups did not become highly engaged in the discussion of drinking or pursue any discussions of substance abuse beyond alcohol.

Concluding remarks

Focus group discussions provide insights into participants' opinions and ideas about topics discussed. Through group interaction and synergy, ideas may be elicited that would not have come out during individual interviews alone or through paper or telephone surveys. In evaluating the results of focus group interviews it is important to remember that findings cannot be generalized to a wider population, even when focus group participants are "like" the population of interest. It is also important to remember that participants were promised anonymity; they were told that the discussions would be summarized in a report but names and department identifications would not be provided. Finally, suggestions about what Parkland might do to enhance the implementation of core values were not evaluated in terms of feasibility or whether or not the activity is already underway.

Feelings about Parkland expressed by the focus group participants were very positive. They are proud of Parkland and believe it is an excellent institution and a good place to work. Students, especially, concentrated many of their comments on the supportive environment and willingness of faculty and staff to help them. Employees perceive the college is an excellent place to work and compare it favorably to other organizations where they had worked previously. Participants believe that for the most part Parkland is living up to its core values, although they recognize there are sometimes inherent contradictions or different interpretations about the values. They also recognize that core values may be defined as ideals toward which to strive rather than descriptions of current reality. The one area that seems more problematic than others is that of honest communications. Among some employees there is a belief that not everyone feels comfortable or safe in expressing opinions, and that sometimes decisions are not communicated well to those affected by them.

II. Content Analysis of Written Materials and Webpages

General approach and observations

A secondary approach to studying Parkland's core values was the conduct of a summary content analysis of Parkland written materials and webpages. This component of the study provides additional insights to the College but is of secondary importance to the focus group component. The consultant read each item and made observations about whether or not Parkland's core values were reflected in the materials and, if so, how they were depicted. Some other observations about the materials may be included as well. In doing the analysis the consultant adopted the perspective of a college outsider who did not know a great deal about community colleges in general or Parkland specifically. The observations below are the results of the content analysis. They may be useful as Parkland develops new publications and webpages and thoughtfully considers the message it conveys in these documents to both internal and external audiences.

The written materials reviewed were of high quality. Perhaps the most overriding observation is that publications lack consistency in presenting Parkland's six core values and that some documents contain statements dealing implicitly with values that are not repeated elsewhere; e.g, section about Parkland's personality and character in Policy 1.02, quality statement in Parkland's Strategic Plan, and the nine points in the president's vision statement on the Webpage

This may be due to the fact that some literature was probably prepared before the values were adopted or because the values were not thought to be germane to that particular brochure or publication. It's unlikely a single reader would comb through all this literature to become aware of gaps or of similar but not identical descriptions of values. In the future, Parkland may wish to create a template or checklist to assist those writing and designing publications to systematically evaluate their drafts and make explicit decisions about whether and what to include about the core values.

Observations on specific items

Item	Observations
Catalog 2000-01	• Pp. 15-17 provide strong presence of values • Mission and purposes as presented on Web page • Statement of 6 core values as presented in Parkland College Statement of Core Values • Two sections on assessment (student academic achievement and institutional effectiveness) suggest assessment is important • Cultural diversity statement presented here as well
Computer Usage Policies and Procedures (March 2000 revision)	• Straightforward
Curriculum Committee Procedures Manual	• No date given • Not linked with values statements, though I don't view this is a problem since the manual is a detailed prescription for preparing materials for new and revised courses and curricula • However, if the college wants faculty to incorporate Parkland's values implicitly or explicitly in their syllabi and course materials, then the manual would need to be revised to reflect this

Item	Observations
East Central Illinois Talent Search Program (ecru brochure)	• TRIO grant • Straightforward • Brief
Getting Started at Parkland College	• User friendly, informal tone • Photos show individuals of varied ethnicities and gender, though all but one person appear young • No reference to mission and values
Harassment / Discrimination Policy (I assume this is spring 2000 revision)	• Is it confusing to see the word "values" used here as a verb: "Parkland College values and respects each and every student and is committed to fostering a diverse educational environment."
New Employee Orientation – Supervisors Guide to Orientation for New Employees	• Institutional information provided • No references to college's values, strategic plan, vision or philosophy except a note under Familiarizes section that new employees are familiarized with Parkland's mission • Very task oriented • Where is new employee expected to learn Parkland's values?
Parkland College (Value for a lifetime)	• Not sure what this is—looks like annual report for 1997 • No mention of programs and services at Parkland
Parkland College "Best Kept Secret in East Central Illinois" (one panel, one-side key facts	• Undated • No reference to programs and services or to special character (values) of Parkland
Parkland College Accountability/Program Review Report, August 1, 1999	• Section C-2.1 Annually Updated Priorities Statement is organized under Parkland's four broad goals • On p. 57 is mention that in 1999-2000 the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning is "functioning as the catalyst to form a college-wide discussion of core values and leadership." Did this occur?

Item	Observations
Parkland College Alumni Association "Start here. Get there."	• Concrete benefits for Alumni Association members are presented • Phrase "Start here. Get there." Does not appear in any other literature sent to me.
Parkland College Core Values Campus Input Toward Formation of Parkland College's Core Values	• Widespread involvement • Multiple opportunities for input
Parkland College Core Values Statement of Core Values	• No date • Six core values listed – appear in catalog for 2000-01 as well
Parkland College Environmental Scanning Data (yellow 4-page flyer)	• Fall 1998 and 1999 data presented • A great deal of data presented clearly • Good breakouts by type of information – easy to read • Except for broad umbrella program labels (e.g., AA/AS/Transfer, CE/Course Enrollee, AAS/Occupational, AGS, Certificate) we don't know in what programs or program clusters students are enrolled
Parkland College Foundation	• Quotes reflect diverse, positive experiences of students • Concrete benefits associated with each "level of partnership" are specified – the term "partnership" conveys reciprocity between donor and college, a nice approach • In Did You Know section, no mention of programs and services at Parkland
Parkland College Foundation The Living Tree Program	• Very classy solicitation for funds to plant trees
Parkland College Foundation Patrons for Parkland: Leaving Your Legacy	• Student photos show ethnic diversity • Only one photo of college students
Parkland College Foundation Parkland Update Spring 2000	• No observations
Project G.O.A.L.S. – Graduation . Opportunity. Achievement . Leadership . Success (ecru one-page flyer)	• Student support services funded through TRIO • No reference to Talent Search Program – since both are TRIO-funded, is there a connection?

Item	Observations
Report on the 1999 Diversity Climate Survey – Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation, November 1999	• It would be helpful if there were some discussion of overall findings – how did respondents perceive the climate? -- data are imbedded in tables but may not be readily accessible to the more casual reader or one unfamiliar with reading tables • How was this report disseminated? Was it discussed? Might results be presented in summary form, perhaps with charts?
Seven Simple Strategies for Success	• User friendly, informal tone • Photos show individuals of varied ethnicities and gender, though all but one person appear young • No reference to mission and values
Strategic Plan Parkland College – Strategic Plan for Excellence 2001-2006	• Numerous short vision statements listed under umbrella goal • Goals are not presented until later in the book, which could be confusing since vision statements seem to presume knowledge of the goals • Is the overall vision "By the year 2000, Parkland College will be not only a provider, but also a broker of world-class learning?" • How does the quality philosophy presented in this document fit with Parkland values? The quality statement does not appear in any other literature sent to me • Plan does not present core values or refer to values; is the philosophy statement intended to present the values?
Strategic Plan Agriculture Strategic Plan for Excellence 1999-2004	• Impressive presentation • What agriculture programs does Parkland have? • Does not include section on values
Strategic Plan Health Care Strategic Plan for Excellence 1999-2004	• Impressive presentation • What health care programs does Parkland have? • Does not include section on values

Item	Observations
Strategic Plan Information Technology Strategic Plan for Excellence 1999-2001	• Impressive presentation • What information technology programs does Parkland have? • Does not include section on values
Strategic Plan Industrial Technologies Strategic Plan for Excellence 2000-2004	• Impressive presentation • What industrial technologies programs does Parkland have? • Does not include section on values
Student Policies and Procedures Manual	• [Under revision – new harassment/discrimination policy and revised computer policy were also sent to me] • Lacks preface or introduction • What's the message when the first topic, without any preliminary discussion about the college, is Academic Exclusion? • No reference to values or mission
Web pages (downloaded 7/03/00) President's message (last modified 5/4/99)	• President's vision: nine points • Should this be updated?
Web pages (downloaded 7/03/00) Mission and Purposes	• No date • One sentence mission • 13 purposes – some have values implicit, but is no explicit reference to core values
Web pages (downloaded 7/03/00) Policy and Procedure Manual	Mission statement – Policy 1.01 • Same 13 purposes as on Mission and Purposes page • Last revised 12/96 Personality and Character – Policy 1.02 • Revised March 29, 2000 • Like core values, but are not listed as such and are not the same as the 6 core values listed in catalog for 2000-01 • Character statement does not appear in any other literature sent to me

Concluding remarks

Publications reviewed are high quality, thoughtful, and attractive. Many do not refer to Parkland's core values, probably because they were produced before the values were adopted or because those preparing the documents did not believe the core values were relevant to that publication. Some statements that relate to values are found in a single document but not elsewhere; e.g., the personality and character section of Policy 1.02, the quality statement in Parkland's Strategic Plan, and the nine points in the president's vision statement on the Webpage. To strengthen emphasis on Parkland's six core values, the college may wish to revisit its other "values" statements when publications are revised and decide whether the institution would be better served by presenting the six core values.

III. Concluding Comment

Based on this study it appears Parkland College's core values are generally understood and are consistent with the ways in which students and employees experience and describe the institution.

Appendix A

PARKLAND COLLEGE
STATEMENT OF CORE VALUES

As an institution of learning, Parkland College cultivates inquiry, practical application of knowledge, and broad enrichment across our community. The following values are important to the fulfillment of Parkland College's mission to provide programs and services of high quality to our students and community.

Honesty and Integrity	In our daily operations, our classrooms, and all of our interactions, it is essential that we communicate openly, truthfully, and without hypocrisy.
Fairness and Just Treatment	We advocate and strive for respect, equity, and justice in all of our operations and proceedings.
Responsibility	We believe that employees and students are personally and mutually accountable for their actions as they carry out their duties. We understand the need to balance the pursuit of our own well-being with concern for others. Likewise, we understand the importance of balancing, personal accountability with graciousness in the acceptance of help from others.
Multiculturalism	We celebrate the diversity in both our community and our world. Our goal is to recognize, promote, utilize, and educate one another regarding the unique qualities and shared humanity of all people and cultures.
Education	We provide a forum for innovation, critical thinking, open inquiry, and lifelong learning opportunities.
Public Trust	In our efforts to serve the community, we honor the trust placed in us by our citizenry. We also rely on our community to guide and advise us as we continue to serve its needs.

Appendix B

Focus Group Interviews – Parkland College - July 2000

Discussion Guide

Introduction

- Welcome
- Statement of purpose for focus group

  Explore your perceptions about Parkland College's core values. We're interested in your opinions about such topics as whether people know about these core values; whether Parkland's faculty, administrators, staff and students behave in a way that is consistent with the core values; and how the college can do an even better job of making these values come to life.

- Guidelines we'll follow during conversation

  - There are no right or wrong answers
  - You don't need to speak in order or talk about every topic we discuss
  - Sometimes exchanges get excited - please try not to jump in
  - One person speak at a time
  - I may need to step in and redirect our conversation because our time is limited

Clarify and Define Key Terms

- Many of you are familiar with the term "core values". In your own words, what would you say "core values" means?
- How would you describe Parkland's core values?
- Let me distribute a copy of the core values so we can refer to them during our discussion.

  HAND OUT STATEMENT OF CORE VALUES

Major Questions about Core Values

- Are people at Parkland familiar with these core values?
  How do employees learn about them? How do students learn about them? Do

you think people outside the college know about these core values?

- Are some of these values more important or visible than others?
- Do people at Parkland act in ways that are consistent with these values?

  Can you give me some examples of ways in which people act consistently with each value?

  [I WILL GUIDE DISCUSSION TO COVER EACH VALUE]

  Can you give me some examples of ways in which people act in ways that are inconsistent or contradict each value?

  [I WILL GUIDE DISCUSSION TO COVER EACH VALUE]

- What would be some ways Parkland could encourage and support people to live out these core values?
- What kinds of things should Parkland stop doing—things that get in the way of people living out the core values?

Questions about related topics

[BRING UP IF TOPICS AREN'T COVERED IN PREVIOUS CONVERSATION]

I'd like to shift to some other subjects, now. These subjects are related to Parkland's core values.

- There's been a lot of national attention lately to cheating and plagiarism in colleges. Are these concerns at Parkland?

  [LET DISCUSSION TAKE OFF NOW, WITH PROMPTS TO BE USED AS NEEDED TO PROBE OPINIONS ABOUT INCIDENCE OF CHEATING/PLAGIARISM, WHAT THE COLLEGE DOES OR SHOULD DO ABOUT IT, ETC.]

- There's also been a great deal of national attention to the incidence of drinking on campuses. Is this a concern at Parkland?

  [LET DISCUSSION TAKE OFF NOW, WITH PROMPTS TO BE USED AS NEEDED TO PROBE OPINIONS ABOUT INCIDENCE OF DRINKING AND PERHAPS OTHER SUBSTANCE ABUSE, WHAT THE COLLEGE DOES OR

SHOULD DO ABOUT IT, ETC.]

Wrap-up

- Suppose you had one minute to talk about Parkland's core values. What would you say?
- [I'LL GIVE 2-3 MINUTE SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION]

  Is this an adequate summary? Does it capture what we talked about?
- Have we missed anything?

Closing

- Your responses remain anonymous
- I'll be writing a brief report of all our focus group discussions. I may also be giving a brief presentation during August.
- Do you have any questions?

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